

Working Group 6 „Youth Participation“

June 25 2007 from 14h – 16h30

June 26, 2007 from 9h – 11h

Devise of the working group:

“Participation of children and young persons in decision-making processes and public life should be encouraged. In this context, youth initiatives should be supported and the activities of youth organizations should be promoted. Further, children and young persons should be made aware of the challenges of sustainable development and become actors of sustainable development in cities” .

Moderation: Sander Dekker, Alderman for the Youth of The Hague and Esther Visser, Youth Office of The Hague

Expert: Dr. Jan van Gils, Director Research Centre Childhood and Society, Belgium, President European Network Child-friendly Cities

RESULTS

(See also presentation of Mr. Dekker)

Definition

Youth Participation is the active involvement of children and youngsters in public life (decision-making and social activities).

Levels of Youth Participation

- Active role in planning
- Active role in decision-making
- Active role in implementation
- Active role in evaluation

What makes youth participation work?

1. Take children and youth seriously – it is their right to participate (CRC art. 12)
2. Give them responsibility and trust their potentials
3. Discuss the procedures with them (and give them an equal role in making and applying rules)

4. Introduce a clear and defined planning and time-table
5. Reply to their questions (open dialogue)
6. Recognize their needs (and be responsive to them)
7. Explain them why some of their needs can not be fulfilled
8. Be prepared to invest money and human resources into the process and outcome of youth participation
9. Be prepared to train and equip adults in facilitating youth participation
10. Anchor the rights of children and youth (for instance by introducing a Youth Ombudsman)

Pitfalls

- We tend to give children and youth less influence, the more important issues get
- Be careful not to apply youth participation for symbolic reasons
- Do not exaggerate youth participation
- Youth participation only on adult's request
- Applying the wrong method related to age and topic
- Those who are involved in youth participation are not always representative (bias toward certain groups)
- Being too complacent to children's and young people's desires

Working agenda

1. Internet Platform to disseminate ideas and experiences (and interconnecting the various networks on child friendly cities)
2. Case descriptions from the different cities following a certain format
3. Sharing inventories/ overviews of youth participation projects in each city
4. Involve children and young people in sharing their opinions and experiences about youth participation
5. Open invitation to cities within the network to visit youth participation projects in different cities/ countries
6. Thinking of possibilities for children and young people to influence the issues that are discussed during the annual conference
7. Optional for the future, organizing sessions with children and young people – with possibilities for interaction between adults and kids

DISCUSSION

1) Definition of Youth Participation

- Involvement in public life, implementation, monitoring of ideas
- Expression of own identity in public space
- Be part of the decision-making process

2) What makes Youth Participation successful?

- Give children aims, make them feel they belong to the city
- Political processes take too long for children – explain the processes to them and take away barriers
- Respect them – ask them what's going on, work together with them
- Have a budget for your plans – realize the ideas children have
- Children should be proud and happy of the results, have fun
- Direct democracy is important – they can practice it in school classes (weekly meetings and discussions on topics that concern the children, for instance: Which exercises should we do next week?)
- “Model United Nations” could be installed on a local level as well
- Adults allow Youth Participation only when it “doesn't hurt” – hard topics: no participation possible
- Children have to have the impression that they are taken seriously
- Children aren't adults! Let them use their own methods
- Try to maintain their attention by explaining them the procedures and why some processes may take long. Otherwise children tend to get bored.

Protocol by Miriam Schreuer, Robert Bosch Foundation